

Jesse's camps diaries 2019

Our planning meetings began in January. Excitement and enthusiasm were in the air. Bobby Sparks, coordinator for Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs (TPRNA) guided us through a review of last year to decide how to make adjustments. Community Center Supervisors, Aeshah McQueen-Jefferson (Walker-Ford), John Doherty (Jack McLean), and Ameer Hart (LeVerne Payne), were ready with their ideas for field trips and activities. How very fortunate we are to have the level of enthusiasm and commitment to serve our community each carries with them. I could tell this year's camps would be awesome!

In the week prior to camp, Mary Allgire (board member of the Friends of Old Time Dance) returned to teach our staff basic old time dance steps. They will teach this to our youngsters during the week so everyone will be ready for our old time dance on teacher planning day. Since it was such a success last year, we're expanding it to include all groups.

The band warms up: <https://youtu.be/UgNwWGSCVCM>

Circle Dance: <https://youtu.be/UgNwWGSCVCM>

Mary teaching the staff how to dance: <https://youtu.be/gtSBXkOwSAE>

Of course, this project wouldn't grow without all the love that goes into it! Dear friend Donna reached out to her community again this year and raised quite a tidy sum for fresh organic fruits, veggies and snacks. We shopped until our carts were too full to move! You should have seen Greg's and my house after that! The dining room table was filled with tantalizing snacks including fresh dates, peanut butter filled pretzels and so much more. Our fridge was loaded with grapes, cut fruit, blueberries and carrots. The family room was filled with bananas, apples, watermelons, chips and popcorn, and beverage boxes. And, a very special treat was a basket filled with just picked grapefruit from our dear friends Tom and Katya Taylor who also gift our youngsters with cooperative games and poetry. How do I thank all those who do so much to offer their love and support?



Monday. It's a beautiful day. Clear skies, warmish temperature. My dear neighbor Kathleen comes over early in the day to help load all our bounty into Greg's truck. My pup, Bogey, walks in and out the door for each trip we make as if he knows something quite special is going on and wants to be part of it. All loaded and ready to go.



First on our stop was LeVerne Payne where there are about 30 youngsters running around outside playing games. Their laughter and noise are music to my ears. Next stop is Walker-Ford. We get our goodies unloaded pretty quickly. There are 40 youngsters today with more expected during the week. Cece (our math wizard) has already had her first session at LeVerne Payne and Walker-Ford this morning. Her musical sister, Jane, brought her guitar and led some songs. Math and Music! What a great way to begin the day.

Then, on to Jack McLean. I met the new Assistant Supervisor Kelley, and renewed my friendship with Connie. Their 40+ youngsters were also outdoors playing. I am looking forward to spending some time each day going on field trips and enjoying our youngsters. There is so much planned it will be hard to choose.

Kathleen and I drove back home laughing and talking about our incredible community and how it nourishes and nurtures us. We truly are blessed.

One special note: Aeshah created a "passport" for Walker-Ford which is a creative tool to help their youngsters participate in the week in a thoughtful way. What I love about this passport is how it encourages our youngsters to think about what they want to do during the week, record what they did and their reaction to it. It also encourages them to get to know those who are teaching or leading various activities, and it gives them a place for autographs from their new friends.

Tuesday. I arrive at LeVerne Payne and there's much outdoor activity. Glad the weather is being so cooperative. Cece and Jane are busily organizing today's "brain games" activities for some kindergarteners and first graders. Jane begins with song and movement and we're all dancing and being silly. Cece's lesson was on shapes. She brought some large glossy pictures with matching plastic pieces shaped in triangles, squares, and more.



The children spent time putting the pieces in their places to make the picture they wanted to make. There were cars, turtles, robots, spaceships and more. Another activity was using their imaginations to create objects from the shapes. Then, Jane pulled out her guitar and led some songs. Old MacDonald had a weird farm including elephants and dinosaurs was one of the favorites. Great session! Lots of fun, and these youngsters were great at following directions. It fills me with joy to see them getting the message that learning can be so much fun!

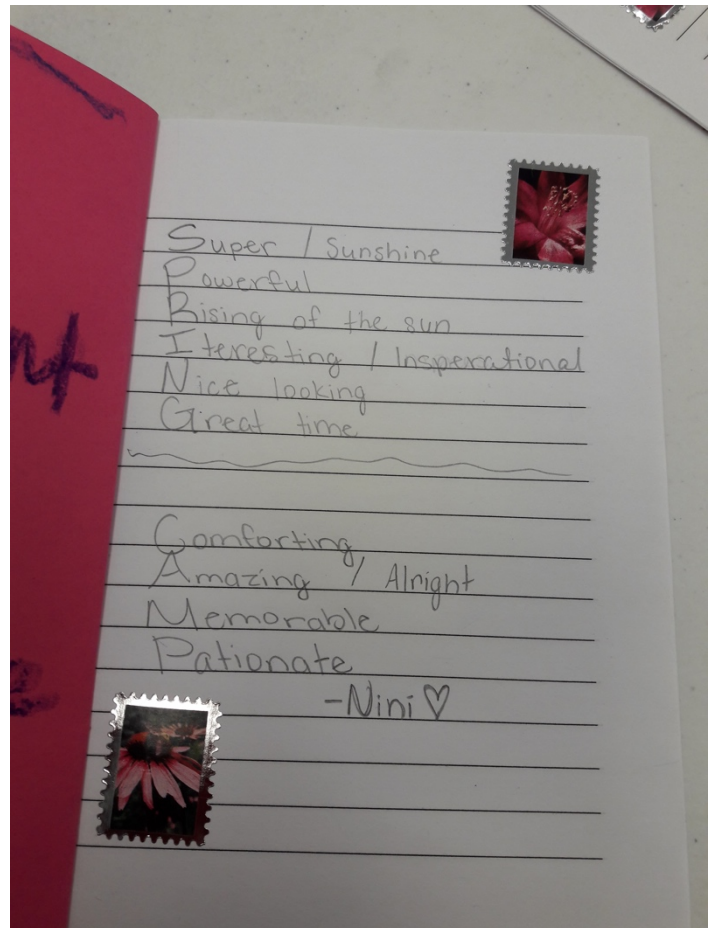
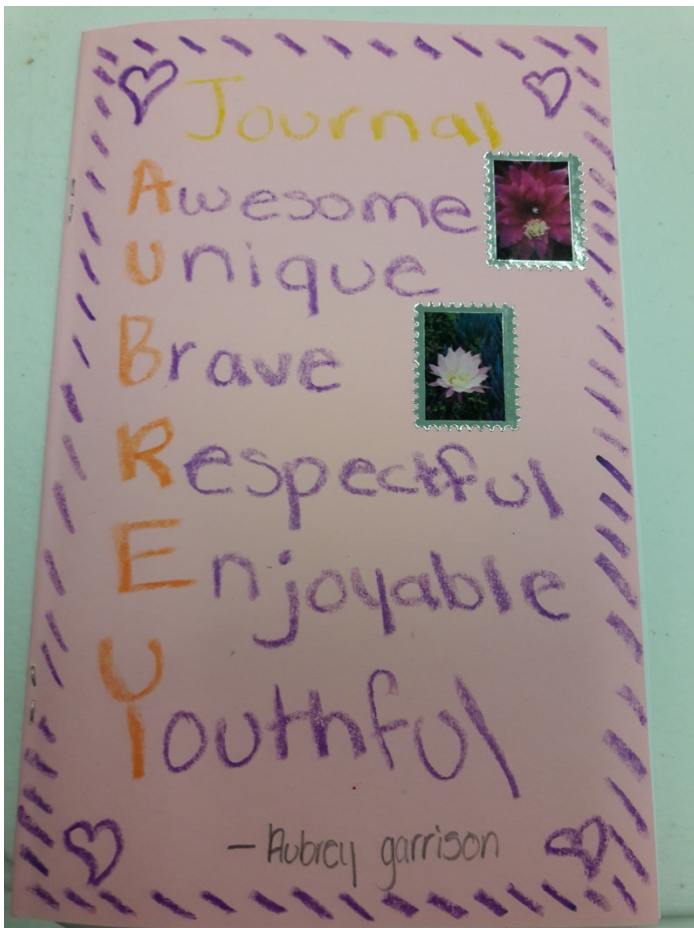
This afternoon, the Walker-Ford group went to the IMAX center to visit the planetarium. The Jack McLean group went to the Tallahassee Museum (fondly known to us long timers as the Junior Museum).

Wednesday. I begin my day with Katya as we set up a room in Walker-Ford for 10 youngsters to join in her poetry workshop. A quiet room is set with empty journals, a box of crayons, and a small vase of flowers. Soon, the energy is bursting as youngsters find their way in, take their seats at the space with their favorite color journals, and we begin our journey into poetry. It's the first day of spring, and Katya builds on that theme for today's session.

Katya is in love with a form called "acrostics" which asks you to write a word vertically and then use each of those letters as the first letter of words which describe that word. She shows our group the word TREE and then reads her poem about the tree as an example. Tall, Reaching for the sky, Elegant, Ever green.

Each child was asked to write their name vertically and using each letter of their name write a poem to describe themselves, almost like a self-portrait. Very challenging! They each read their poem to the group.

We wrote two more poems. One on SPRING since this is its first day. The other was to describe their experience at CAMP. Some enjoyed this session more than others, but everyone was a good sport in participating.



The afternoon was a large group activity where all the groups met at Jack McLean for movies and popcorn.

Thursday. This is a day filled with field trips for our groups. Walker-Ford went to Panacea for a field trip to the FSU Specimen Lab.



Jack McLean and LeVerne Payne went to The Grove. From the new Assistant Supervisor, Kelley Boykins, “Spring break camp participants from the Jack McLean Community Center enjoyed a visit to The Grove Museum. The kids enjoyed a search and find adventure of flowers and birds on the estate. The group finished off with story time read by museum staff.”



Friday. Tom Taylor is teaching cooperative games at Jack McLean. In Tom's own words: I led cooperative games at Jesse's camp this morning. This is the team that learned that we can have a good time without having any losers. We need more opportunities like this, where everyone can have fun, succeeding at shared challenges and being winners!

Here is more info:

<http://inewgames.com/>

<http://www.ultimatecampresource.com/.../cooperative-games.pag...>

<http://www.mrgym.com/CooperativeGames.htm>

<https://www.jmu.edu/.../hpains.../documents/CooperativeGames.pdf>



Friday afternoon is the day for a huge carnival. Because of the glorious weather, we were outdoors. There were all kinds of games, but the hit of the day was the enormous bouncy house.



Monday finds all three groups meeting at Walker-Ford for our old time dance. Kudos to Mary (who is a teacher) for being able to get all these highly energized youngsters into circles for the dances and making it so much fun! The Long Forgotten String Band made time to introduce their instruments (guitar, fiddle, mandolin and banjo) to the group. The group had so many questions for them. The highlight for me was when band member, Frank, shared with the group that the other instruments' origins are European but the banjo is African. That cultural note had impact on our group. Things learned from dancing: taking directions quickly, being respectful, cooperating, inclusiveness, quieting down quickly to hear the next direction, music appreciation, and some history.



Imagine this: after all that dancing, one group went to the Junior Museum and another went to the IMAX!

An incredible week for all. In their own words from their thank you notes:



I learned a new game called bean toss and I was partners with my BFF.

I learned my time tables in math class.

I learned how to do poetry.

I played math games. It was fun.

The museum we went to was so cool. I heard about people I never knew.

I loved all of the field trips. My favorite was the aquarium.

I loved their lunches.

I really enjoyed the carnival. My favorite thing was the bouncy house.

I loved the sno cones at the carnival. There were 4 colors. I had one of each.

The thing I like about the camp is the fun.

I love the camp!

Thank you so much for making my spring break good. I am very grateful for all you've done for us.

Another year of Jesse's camps is behind us. As I look through all the photos, I smile and imagine how many wonderful moments youngsters, staff and guests enjoyed. We are creating a magical time and it delights me to my core that we are able to do this. I can't help thinking in a nostalgic way how much Jesse would love this! I can see in my mind's eye the same sparkle in his eyes as I see in these youngsters as they play with abandon. As always, my gratitude to Ashley Edwards, Director of Tallahassee Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs and her amazing and talented staff for allowing us to partner with them.

Feel free to share this with those you think would love to see it. We are always looking for ways to grow. Please share your thoughts with me.

Over the next few weeks, photos and videos from the week will be posted at <https://www.talgov.com/parks/JesseCorreiaMemorialScholarship.aspx> where you can see more of what took place.

As always, if you wish to make a tax deductible donation, your check should be made to FOOP/Jesse's camps. Mail it to: FOOP, c/o PRNA, 1201 Myers Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301. Your dollars remain right here in our community and they go entirely into this project.

With deep love and gratitude,

Martha Weinstein

Jesse's mom